BUFFALO OFFICER FIRED AFTER OVERDOSING ON OPIOIDS | PAGE B1

THE BUFFALO NEWS

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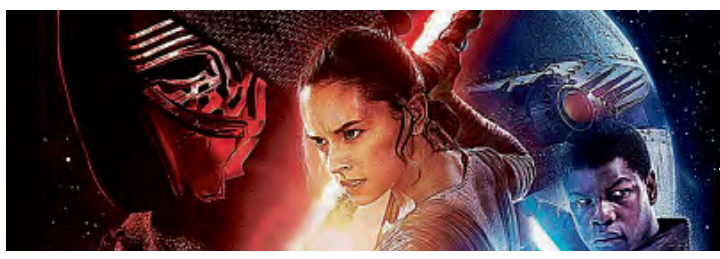

'THE LAST JEDI' A FIRST-RATE FILM

LIFE & ARTS, PAGE C1

Eichel nets hat trick, but Sabres fall again

SPORTS, PAGE D1

Corker, Rubio give GOP tax plan momentum toward passage next week

By Jim Tankersley and Thomas Kaplan
NEW YORK TIMES

Inside: *LOBBYISTS PULLED OUT ALL THE STOPS IN TAX DEBATE. PAGE A4*

WASHINGTON – Republican lawmakers secured enough votes Friday to pass the most sweeping tax overhaul in decades, putting them on the cusp of their first significant legislative victory as leaders geared up to pass a $1.5 trillion tax cut along party lines and send it to President Trump by Christmas.

A day after the bill's fate appeared somewhat in doubt, Republican leaders notched two victories Friday, when Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida said he would vote yes after gaining a more generous child tax credit in the final bill, and Sen. Bob Corker of Tennessee, who voted against the initial Senate bill over deficit concerns, said he would support the legislation. The bill also won praise from Sen. Susan Collins of Maine, leaving it likely to pass with all 52 Senate Republicans in support.

The final legislation released by Republicans on Friday follows the broad strokes of the previous House and Senate bills, providing deep and long-standing tax cuts for businesses, including a corporate tax rate of 21 percent, down from the current 35 percent. The bill also provides temporary tax benefits for low- and middle-income Americans, including lower marginal tax rates, and a new top tax rate of 37 percent for the wealthiest Americans, down from 39.6 percent. All the individual tax breaks will expire at the end of 2025.

The final bill does build back in some of the prized tax breaks that had been slated for elimination in the House legislation, including the deduction for high out-of-pocket medical costs, tax-free tuition waivers for graduate students and the ability to deduct interest on student

See **Taxes** on Page A9

Singing the songs of the season

Sharon Cantillon/Buffalo News

Soprano Katy Miner sings "We Three Kings" during Friday morning's Holiday Pops concert by the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra before a sold-out crowd at Kleinhans Music Hall. The show repeats at 8 p.m. today and 2:30 p.m. Sunday. One of the highlights of the concert is a lively presentation of "The Polar Express" narrated by Channel 7 meteorologist Mike Randall. *See review on Page C1 and additional photos on the Picture Page, D12.*

In East Aurora, all they want for Christmas is a world record

By Barbara O'Brien
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Don Vidler thinks the weather will be perfect for the 45th annual Carolcade in front of Vidler's 5 & 10 in East Aurora today.

He also thinks there will be more people this year than last year, when the Carolcade tried to set a Guinness World Record for the largest caroling event outdoors. The unofficial count from last year, when it was cold and rainy, is 2,300. Was it big enough for the record?

"Believe it or not, it's still pending," Vidler said.

Guinness requires a lot of documentation, he said. He sent photos and an hourlong video along with his request last year. In July, Guinness asked for more, and in September Vidler got word that the event was still being examined.

"My gut feeling is, we won't get it," he said.

See **Carolers** on Page A8

Mark Mulville/News file photo

Tama Gresco-Sauers was one of 2,300 singers at last year's East Aurora Carolcade. The total is up for consideration as a world record.

Flanagan seems unfazed by talk of takeover

State Senate majority leader 'confident' GOP will remain in control

By Tom Precious
NEWS ALBANY BUREAU CHIEF

Senate Majority Leader John J. Flanagan, left , says he has a good rapport with Sen. Jeff Klein.

ALBANY – Democrats are pledging to reunite as early as April to oust control of the State Senate from Republicans, who have dominated the chamber for most of the past 100 years.

To the current Senate Republican majority leader, John Flanagan, a seemingly singular response is offered: Yawn.

"I'm confident we're going to continue to be in a good position," Flanagan said despite the "framework" deal cut several weeks ago by Democrats to end years of internecine feuding as early as this coming spring to take over the 63-member Senate.

"I'm confident, whether it's January or May, we will be in charge of the Senate," Flanagan told The Buffalo News in his first interview since Democrats – including Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo – last month claimed they reached a consensus to rejoin splintered Senate Democratic factions.

The GOP leader parried question after question about how worried the Republican conference is that it faces a loss of power sometime next year. It is the Senate that serves as the sole point of power for Republicans in Albany, as Democrats command the Assembly and hold all four statewide offices.

Is Flanagan really this confident or are his claims merely being expressed for consumption by voters, campaign donors and even his own GOP conference members?

Flanagan, for starters, believes the GOP maintains strong ties with the Senate's Independent Democratic Conference. That's the group of eight breakaway Democrats, led by Bronx's Sen. Jeff Klein, which has for several years enjoyed a power-sharing arrangement with Flanagan's Republicans. With Sen. Simcha Felder, a Brooklyn Democrat who conferences with the Republicans, the GOP hold has been further cemented.

There's some history for that confidence. In 2014, the IDC announced mid-year it would be reuniting with mainline Democrats. It never happened.

But to listen to Cuomo and Democrats, this year is different. Under immense pressure from the left flank of the Democratic Party's base, Cuomo has stepped up his efforts, at least publicly, to try to broker a peace among warring Senate Democrats.

See **Senate** on Page A9

Strategic Financial sticking to jobs goal

Still aims to hire 1,500 in five years

By Matt Glynn
NEWS BUSINESS REPORTER

The rows of empty cubicles inside Strategic Financial Solutions in Amherst are a sign of what's coming: more employees.

A lot more.

The Manhattan-based firm is in the midst of a hiring push, as it aims to have at least 1,500 local employees in five years.

So far, though, the company has a long way to go. It has more than 30 employees on board and expects to double that number within several weeks, as more people get trained. Its goal is to steadily fill office space at its Lawrence Bell Drive contact center as it grows.

CEO Ryan Sasson is confident the company will meet its lofty goals, which would turn the company into one of the Buffalo Niagara region's biggest private employers.

"It is a matter of making sure that business continues to grow," he said Friday as he and some VIPs cut a ribbon at the company's new facility. "All of the output of people we hire are based on the number of clients that we're servicing and helping. And so obviously we need to keep building that and reaching out to people to help them."

Strategic Financial Solu-

See **Jobs** on Page A8

IN WNY VISIT, GILLIBRAND STICKS TO SCRIPT

Sen. Kirsten E. Gillibrand declined to speak about her Twitter battle with President Trump in an appearance at the Harkness Center. *Story on Page B1*

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WEATHER
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